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WTO MINISTERIAL BOOSTS MOMENTUM FOR TRADE EXPANSION

At the conclusion of the second Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), in Geneva, Switzerland, United States Trade Representative Barshefsky said, "This meeting demonstrates that there is strong momentum throughout the world for market opening reform and U.S. leadership is critical to moving this process forward."

She praised the outcome of the Ministerial and commented, "We are at a critical moment in preparing the trading system and its institutions for the 21st century. Making the WTO more transparent and accessible for all our citizens is critical if we are to build public confidence necessary for further trade expansion."

Ambassador Barshefsky remarked further, "I was particularly pleased that President's Clinton's offer to host the 1999 Ministerial was welcomed by the WTO Membership. This demonstrates the continuing U.S. commitment to further opening global markets and a recognition of U.S. leadership." The WTO member countries named Ambassador Barshefsky as chair of the 1999 Ministerial.

"I am also gratified by our success in securing global commitments on electronic commerce," Ambassador Barshefsky stated. "Within the past week, we also secured separate agreements with Japan and the EU on this issue. In Geneva, the WTO Ministers agreed to take the first step in creating the predictable and stable environment that is vital to the growth of electronic commerce. The two main elements include: a commitment by governments to not impose customs duties on Internet electronic transmissions and setting up a work program to examine the wide range of trade issues that are related to electronic commerce."

While the ministers also agreed to examine all options for negotiations in 1999, the built in agenda of the WTO will proceed as previously agreed regardless of any other decisions made.

“In his remarks before the WTO, President Clinton stressed, among other issues, the urgent need for the WTO to respond to citizens of the world, increase transparency and create an on-going dialogue with labor, consumer, environmental, and other interests.”

Ambassador Barshefsky added, “We need to take immediate and decisive action to open up our institutions - from consultations to dispute settlement. We should make sure that trade officials spare no effort to address the range of issues to expand transparency and accountability. I was struck that countries at all levels of development made reference to the importance of increasing public understanding and promoting transparency as the best means to do so.”

